

It is impossible to convey the hole in my heart, the emptiness I feel, there aren't \_enough\_ words in the English language to describe the impact my son had on those he met throughout his short life. From the day he was born, I knew he was something special. It was in the glint of his eyes when he couldn't figure out a problem, in the sound of his laughter as it reverberated through our home, in the shine of his smile whenever he came home from school. He was special. I know every parent feels that way about their kid, but it's true -- Ian was unique.

Public Education and our society's obsession with perfection by keeping score forces unique individuals like Ian underground. Ian was called an “enigma” in school. He did not embrace the collective mold, he learned differently and excelled, which baffled bureaucratic administrators. Instead of embracing the uniqueness and individuality that was Ian, the standard tactics of pounding a square peg into a round hole were used. The effects on Ian were devastating. Julie and I supported Ian’s uniqueness and individuality. Over-time he embraced his individuality, applying an entrepreneurial spirit that didn't sit well in the cookie-cutter world. However, Ian’s individual worldview started to take route.

Ian’s world view embraced people as individuals; money was necessary but not the root of existence. Race, gender, disability and learning styles were

attributes of individual humans. The concept of unique individuality, learning style and attributes defined and seeded his value system. Who knows where all of this would have taken him! The seeds were taking root and developing when his life was cut short. We know what we witnessed from this young man, my son, and I am extremely proud and honored to be his Dad.

Losing him is the hardest thing I've ever dealt with and I know the spot left behind is irreplaceable -- I will deal with that for the rest of my days. At the same time, my son was absolutely not the kind of person who would want his friends, his family, and his loved ones to stand by and let grief consume him. He would want his memory to be celebrated and honored through love, laughter, adventure, and a deep appreciation of everything our lives have to offer.

In honor of my son, please hug your children a little tighter today. Please take a few minutes to appreciate what this planet has to offer. And please, most of all, be kind to one another.

Thank you.